

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION: THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSEBOOKS IN THE GREEK STATE SCHOOLS

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Abstract: Descriptive and skill-specific studies have provided a wealth of data concerning the type and frequency of strategy use as well as of the various factors that influence selection and frequency of such use, but little is known about language learning strategy instruction that is thought to help learners develop strategic knowledge and skills.

Relevant research has not been very productive beyond the fact that when learners ‘embark on or sail along’ foreign language learning they need to be directed toward using strategies that would make their endeavours less tiresome and more effective. More insights are required to find out whether and how strategies are promoted by the foreign language curriculum, the language teachers, or the coursebooks to assist the development of learner self-management.

After reviewing relevant literature, the present paper focuses on language learning strategy instruction in classroom settings by investigating the extent to which such instruction is integrated in EFL classes in the Greek context. Evidence will be gathered by examining the English coursebooks currently in use in the Greek primary and secondary schools, as it is those books that suggest the practices prescribed by the curriculum and deployed by EFL teachers to foster learners’ ability to select appropriate strategies for successful language learning.

1. Introduction

Language learning strategies (LLS) have been widely investigated mainly in relation to individual learner variables concerning age, gender, proficiency level, motivation, learning styles, beliefs, and so on (Carson and Longhini 2002, Ehrman and Oxford 1990, Γρίβα, Σέμογλου και Κοσσυβάκη 2010, Hong-Nam and Leavell 2006, Horwitz 1987, Kazamia 2003, Lan and Oxford 2003, K.O. Lee 2003, Li and Qin 2006, Littlemore 2001, Magogwe and Oliver 2007, Mochizuki 1999, Oxford 1996, Oxford and Ehrman 1989, Παπάνης 2008, Psaltou-Joycey 2008, 2010, Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou 2009, Psaltou-Joycey and Sougari 2010, Purdie and Oliver 1999, Rossi-Le 1995, Sadighi and Zarafshan 2006, Victori and Tragant 2003, Vrettou 2009, 2011, Wakamoto 2000, Wenden 1991, 1999, Wharton 2000). These factors are expected to influence selection and frequency of strategy use.

However, issues related to ways that learners can be instructed to apply strategies efficiently and effectively, and how this can be accomplished have not been so widely investigated. Any such instruction could be part of the language curriculum, of an approach adopted by the language teacher, and/or be incorporated into the language textbook. The teacher’s role is central to such instruction, therefore, we should make

sure that our teachers have the knowledge, understanding, and skill to implement it (Rubin *et al.* 2007). L2 textbooks, on the other hand, can become useful guides for teachers along with any accompanying Teacher's books, if they have integrated task-based strategy instruction aiming at the increase of student proficiency, strategy awareness, and self-regulation.

2. Language learning strategy instruction background

Learning strategy instruction (LSI) primarily “refers to ways by which teachers can help learners become more effective learners. Most often this help is viewed as being directly woven into regular L2 teaching as a primary component” (Oxford 2011: 175). Teachers, in other words, reveal the process of performing to learners so that they arrive at successful outcomes, that is, effective learning; students are not only taught the language but also are directed towards using language learning strategies that can enhance their learning and promote their autonomy.

Learning strategy instruction can be either *implicit* (indirect) or *explicit* (direct). *Implicit instruction* happens when strategies are integrated into L2 textbooks or teaching but are not explicitly mentioned or practised. Learners are usually told what to do for the completion of a particular language task but they may think that the strategy or strategies are part of the L2 task (Oxford 2011: 181). With such an approach, they are left uninformed about the importance of the procedures they are asked to follow; emphasis is on learning something rather than on learning how to learn. As a consequence, they may not be able to transfer the successful strategies to other similar tasks, or make decisions about selecting others that work better for them, but they continue to depend on instructions by the teacher or the textbook, thus lacking autonomy in their learning. Oxford (1990: 207) strongly supports *explicit instruction* by arguing that,

“Research shows that strategy training which fully informs the learner (by indicating why the strategy is useful, how it can be transferred to different tasks, and how learners can evaluate the success of the strategy) is more successful than training that does not”.

Indeed research on learning strategy instruction has favoured explicit instruction that is incorporated in the normal teaching programme (Dörnyei 2005, McDonough 1999). Simply naming, describing, and presenting learning strategies to raise students' strategy awareness is not enough for them to adopt learning strategies. They must be given opportunities to put them into practice in an explicit manner while practising language, first by being shown how to use them and afterwards by trying them out repeatedly until they feel confident to make their own selections and appropriate applications. In this way their relevance is reinforced, and students get practice in a meaningful way which is required for the use of strategies to be proceduralised (Holec 1996). The students' L1 or a combination of the L1 and L2 could be used as the language of instruction at the initial stages of learning (Chamot 2004, Grenfell and Harris 1999), as this can lift tension from beginning students, especially those of very young ages (Chamot 2004).

Several models for teaching LLSs in first and second language contexts have been developed. Common to all is a sequence of steps that have to be followed. For instance, the CALLA: *Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach* (Chamot and O'Malley 1987) involves 5 phases of instruction:

- a. *preparation*: teacher raises awareness of the strategies students are already using

- b. *presentation*: teacher presents and models strategies to help students become aware of their own thinking and learning processes
- c. *practice*: students are given multiple practice opportunities which help them move towards autonomous use of strategies and scaffolding is gradually withdrawn
- d. *evaluation*: students apply self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies they used
- e. *expansion*: students transfer them to new tasks

Similar steps are suggested by other strategy instruction models which also emphasise the importance of presentation, practice, and evaluation of strategy use (Chamot 2004, 2005, 2009, Chamot *et al.* 1999, Grenfell and Harris 1999, Macaro 2001, O'Malley and Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990).

LSI is not a 'mechanistic experience' which the teacher and the learner can follow as a drill. It requires both reflection and evaluation. Besides "it is influenced by the learning context, the nature of the task, and each learner's style, goals, and background knowledge" (Rubin *et al.*, 2007: 142). Moreover, it largely depends on the teachers' interest and motivation (Chamot and Küpper 1989), their flexibility in different instructional approaches, and their concern about their learners' specific needs (K.R. Lee 2007).

3. Learning strategy instruction research in Greece

Interest in foreign language learning strategy instruction has become quite productive in Greece and this can be manifested by several research studies, mainly PhD theses that have been conducted in the last decade. In this section, therefore, I will provide a brief overview of such studies in direct learning strategy instruction which cover primary, secondary and tertiary educational levels.

Two studies have examined the increase of the frequency of strategy use in the general proficiency level of two different age and cultural groups after the implementation of a strategy instruction programme in EFL classes.

Gavriilidou and Papanis (2009) examined the effect of a strategy instruction programme on Muslim primary school students learning English as a FL. Of the 122 students who participated in the study, the experimental group followed a specially designed programme aiming at increasing frequency of strategy use in reading and listening comprehension and vocabulary learning. Both groups were pre- and post-tested by means of a questionnaire. The results showed that the experimental group, compared to the control group, reported use of significantly more metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies after the intervention programme.

Σαραφianού [Sarafianou] (2013) studied the effects of direct and integrated strategy instruction to students of upper secondary education and found that the intervention resulted in the increase of all types of strategy use for the experimental group in the post test and also in comparison to the control group.

The following studies have examined the results of direct strategy instruction of a small number of strategies in specific skill areas, namely, reading comprehension and writing, at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

Manoli (2013) investigated the effectiveness of implementing strategy instruction of the strategies of predicting text content, using semantic maps prior to text reading, skimming, scanning, and contextual guessing, in the reading performance of primary EFL students. The results indicated that the EFL students who received strategy training improved their performance in both the posttest and follow-up measurements in relation to the students in the control group.

Tsiriotakis' (2013) study examined the effects of explicit strategy-based writing instruction to enhance primary school students' writing skill in English as a FL – in short story writing and in expository essay –, and to reduce their anxiety levels. The results showed that the young learners' writing quality, metacognitive knowledge and skills, and metacognitive behaviour improved and that their anxiety levels were lowered after the intervention.

Pappa, Zafiropoulou, and Metallidou (2003) investigated whether strategy instruction in semantic mapping would produce more successful reading comprehension to 14-15 year olds learning English as a FL, if it was boosted with integrative motivation. One of the two experimental groups received strategy training and motivation boosting, the other received only motivation boosting, whereas the control group did not receive either. All three groups were tested before and after the intervention. The results of the post test showed that both experimental groups improved in reading comprehension but not the control group.

Xirotou (2012) investigated the effect of instruction on written mediation strategies for Greek lower secondary school EFL students. The results indicated an improvement on these strategies for the experimental group after the intervention.

Ριζούλη [Rizouli] (2013) investigated the effect of instruction of two strategies, on the reading comprehension of English texts by university students, studying English for academic purposes. The two strategies were summary and the rhetorical organization of text structure through graphic representations. The results confirmed the expected improvement in reading comprehension of the students in both experimental groups.

Finally, there is the THALES project, a major project currently in progress in Greece, in which Departments from four Greek universities have joined forces to investigate the strategic profiles of EFL primary and secondary school students throughout Greece as well as the strategic profiles of Muslim students learning Greek as a second language in Thrace, North-Eastern Greece. Besides this primary aim, the project has also set to explore general teacher practices that integrate strategy instruction into the regular EFL class in the Greek educational context (for more details about the project see Gavriilidou, this volume).

All these studies have revealed positive results for the students who took part in the instruction programmes and thus strongly support the movement towards LSI.

4. Factors affecting incorporation of language learning strategy instruction

As has already been stated above, the amount of LSI that will be incorporated in the FL classroom depends on (a) the FL curriculum, (b) the course materials and textbooks that emphasise the use of strategies, as well as (c) the teachers who adopt a learning strategy instruction. We should, therefore, examine first, how the Greek curriculum approaches LLSs, second, the successful implementation of LSI in the language class by teachers provided they are aware of what strategies are, and show an ability to integrate them into the curriculum, and, third, whether and how textbooks have integrated task-based strategy instruction in order to improve students' language proficiency and strategy awareness so that they increase their self-regulation.

In the present study I will primarily focus on the English coursebooks currently in use in the state schools, without ignoring the other two factors (curriculum and teachers). So, first, I want to briefly look at the Greek FL curriculum.

4.1 The Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework for Compulsory Education (ΔΕΠΠΣ)

The *Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework for Compulsory Education* (ΔΕΠΠΣ) (2003), issued by the Greek Pedagogical Institute, expects students to develop certain skills in a foreign language over the years. Specifically, it states (p. 355):

“In the context of literacy, multilingualism and multiculturalism, students of primary and secondary schools should develop gradually the following skills:

Receptive and productive language skills such as:

- Understanding and producing continuous and coherent oral and written language
- Understanding and using linguistic and cognitive concepts
- Producing speech acts
- *Using learning and communication strategies* (emphasis added)
- Skills for concurrent use of the L1 and the L2
- Skills for the development of multicultural awareness”

Moreover, for primary education, the expected skills that students must develop in a FL are (p. 365):

- “- Cooperating and negotiating as well as understanding others
- Searching, selecting, collecting, processing, passing and sharing information
- Predicting and making hypotheses
- Decision making, generalising and applying decisions as a means to solve problems
- Using dictionaries, articles, encyclopedias, and literary texts in the foreign language to seek and obtain information on other subjects
- Using and exploiting modern technology”

Likewise, the expected skills for lower secondary education are (p. 376):

- “- Cooperating, negotiating and being flexible
- Understanding of the other
- Predicting and making hypotheses
- Searching, selecting, processing, investigating, using and disseminating information
- Self-presentation
- Continuous improvement of language and recognition of the need for lifelong learning through English
- Knowledge and use of modern technological tools through English”

The curriculum, therefore, does promote the use of learning strategies in the FL lesson as most of the above statements refer to learning and communication strategies.

4.2 The EFL coursebook series

My comments as to whether or to what extent the coursebook series for teaching English as a Foreign Language, currently in use in the Greek state primary and secondary classes, have incorporated language learning strategy instruction in their teaching material will be presented in three separate units. These units coincide with (a) a division into three different educational levels and age groups from the point of view of the teaching of English, and (b) different teams of authors who have been involved in the writing of the books. Consequently, we expect different priorities to be evident through the presentation and practising of the coursebook series materials. The series under discussion are:

- (a) The *Magic Book* (MB) series for 3rd grade, primary education

- (b) The English coursebooks for 4th, 5th, and 6th grades, primary education
- (c) The *Think Teen!* English coursebook series for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, secondary education

4.2.1 The Magic Books 1 and 2

The series has been written with 8-9 year olds in mind, *Magic Book 1* is for 3rd graders in primary school, attending English classes for the first time, and *Magic Book 2* for 3rd graders who have been taught English as a foreign language for two years (A' and B' grades) as part of the *English in School for Young Learners* (PEAP) project (2010-2012).

No explicit reference to language learning strategies is made either in the learners' or in the teachers' books of the series. However, a careful reading of the 'Student's book' (SB) and particularly of the 'Teacher's book' (TB), provides us with examples of LSI albeit in its *implicit* form. That is, the authors do not use relevant terminology, they do not refer explicitly to strategies as such, but they frequently inform teachers of 'why' or of 'what they are doing' when they follow a particular instruction and of the expected outcome. More specifically, the instructions provided to teachers in the TB often serve as a form of teacher strategy training. They inform teachers as to how they are expected to proceed step by step, in each lesson of every unit of the SB. These instructions are not given once in the introductory part of the TB, as we shall see in the other series, but continuous care is taken to remind teachers what they should do and why. In addition, these instructions are accompanied by the rationale *why* the particular practice is recommended and *what* its expected learner outcome should be. This, in my opinion, could be associated with 'implicit teacher strategy training', where teachers are advised to practise with their students a particular strategy or a combination of strategies, although students are not told explicitly of the term connected with the strategy/strategies. Examples (1, 2, 3, and 4 from MB 1, TB p. 9, and 5 from MB 2, TB, p. 85) of relevant instructions and comments can clarify my argument:

1. "Encourage pair and/or group-work during the activities".

Comment: social skills are also developed along with cognitive and linguistic ones".

2. "Begin the lesson by drawing the words taught in the previous lesson and asking them to recall the vocabulary items together with their initials/sounds, e.g., 't' for *tiger*, 'h' for *hare*, 'k' for *kite*, etc.).

Comment: This helps recycle previously taught material and consolidate new knowledge (of letters and vocabulary items)"

3. "You can also use extra materials, such as flashcards, finger puppets, realia and songs. The use of games is strongly recommended".

4. "Revise and recycle vocabulary as often as possible in as many different ways. You may also try to combine meaningful newly taught words with previously taught ones, e.g., *red coat*, *yellow umbrella*, *purple kite*, etc. Always try to associate a letter with the vocabulary item and the corresponding rhyme".

5. "Show the children pictures of planet Earth from space. Proceed with images of rubbish and the ugliness and problems it creates on and off land. Images of deforested areas and dry rivers can also follow. The images are followed by questions (such as: *What can you see in the picture?/ What problem(s) can you see?*)".

Comment: "This step has a double function. It activates the children's schematic knowledge related to environmental issues and it gives the teacher the

opportunity to revise (and the children to remember and produce) vocabulary they may be familiar with from previous exposure to the language”.

In the above excerpts we can recognise a number of strategies being consolidated: Cooperation with peers through games, revision, use of mechanical techniques, association/elaboration.

A few more words about the language skills that are being developed in the MBs and the strategies being promoted: As students are beginners and very young, attention is primarily focused on the development of vocabulary through listening to what is read or said, to recognition of words and phrases in their printed form and to copying of those words or phrases as a writing activity. Development of language skills is progressive. The strategy categories used a lot are: memory, cognitive and social. From the metacognitive strategy category “evaluating your learning” is also practised.

The authors recommend introduction of new material in context – through the use of fairy tales – and frequent repetition and recycling of the taught material. Teachers are constantly reminded of the benefits of repetition especially for the learning, storage and recall of vocabulary items. Structured reviewing of new and old material is recommended all the time.

For comprehension, the authors recommend use of storycards, miming, gesturing, pointing, the use of realia, and acting out the meaning. As these students are young and also beginners, employment of action as a memory strategy is well adjusted.

For practising and recalling of new and old information they recommend role-playing, rhymes, songs, drawing, colouring, games, all of which refer to social and cognitive strategies.

Writing is confined to tracing and copying of vocabulary items and phrases. Practice in speaking is largely promoted through repeating, singing, and producing simple responses to questions. Cultural understanding is developed through topics in the stories and the activities, and internet sites, relating to different sports and board games, different animals, and celebrations.

As for affective strategies, these are promoted implicitly through laughter, music, and rewarding, as cartoons, music, and colourful pictures can be found in each page, intending to create a relaxing, non-threatening classroom atmosphere, so that learners do not feel embarrassed or threatened in the new language environment.





Therefore, what we see in the series is, first, an attempt to increase teachers’ awareness of the learning strategy practices they should implement in their classes by providing scrupulous instructions in the TBs which are accompanied by repetitions, explanations, and comments but without explicit reference to strategies; second, this approach is expected to pass on to the students indirectly, which is understandable, considering the students’ young age and language level. On the one hand, very young learners are still developing their cognitive and metacognitive abilities, and it is not advisable to expose them to notions beyond their cognitive level; on the other, their low competence level would make direct strategy instruction difficult as the teacher should either have to use the learners’ MT for explanations or very simple target language which might make the instruction ineffective and time consuming.

However, to make the series more LSI friendly, I would prefer the authors to have been more explicit with the strategies in the TBs, although I understand that LSI and strategy teacher training were not the focal aims of the series. The reason that prompted me to make this suggestion was that the content of the series and the instructions in the TBs lend themselves to explicit teacher training in order to raise in teachers an awareness of what strategies their students already know and use, what

they will accomplish by adopting particular strategies, and why the books have taken a particular line of teaching. In other words, I would welcome explicit strategy teacher training through the TBs at this level. It's a pity that such well-thought instructions and recommendations do not mention strategies more explicitly.

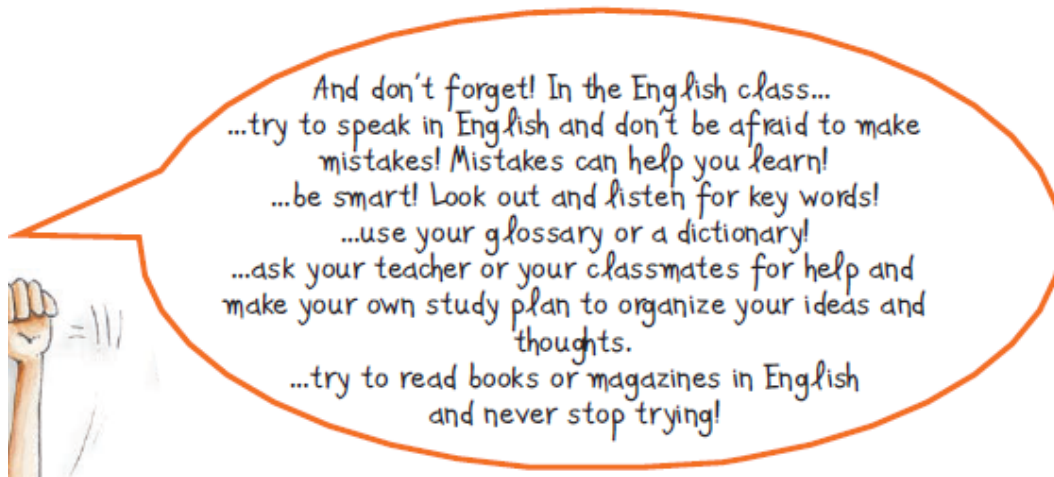
4.2.2 The English coursebooks for 4th, 5th, and 6th grades, primary education

The coursebooks for English, currently used in primary education for the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades, have incorporated language learning strategies as part of the language learning and teaching procedure. In the SBs one can find useful tips, strategy and self assessment corners throughout the books, and students are given the opportunity to read about several strategies they could use for the development of the four language skills, reading, listening, speaking, and writing, as well as for grammar and vocabulary learning. Strategies, therefore, are divided according to the skill area that is practised each time, as in the example that follows:

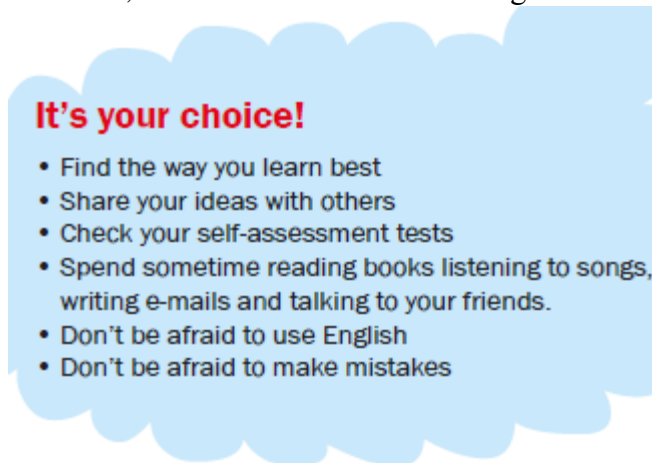
|  Strategy corner - Reading  | | | | | |
|--|-----|----|--|-----|----|
|  When I read a text for the first time | Yes | No |  When I revise a text... | Yes | No |
| I look at the pictures, they help me understand what it's about | | | I study the new words before reading the text again | | |
| I read it and try to understand every word | | | I translate the text in Greek | | |
| I always ask my teacher for the meaning of unknown words to understand the text | | | When I don't remember what a word means, I try to guess the meaning from the text | | |
| I don't worry about unknown words, I try to guess their meaning | | | | | |

(Student's book, 4th grade, p. 21)

Overall, there is an attempt to help learners of all three levels become autonomous during their learning process and beyond, so that they may approach their learning tasks with more self confidence and knowledge of what they are doing and why they are doing something in one and not in another way. In the introductory sections of the SBs there are ideas working towards that direction. Specifically, in the Introduction of the 4th grade SB we can read (p. 8):



Likewise, in the Introduction of the 5th grade Student's book we read (p. 7):



In the Introduction of the 6th grade SB students are encouraged to follow 10 'commandments' if they want to become autonomous learners (p. xiv):

Β. Ο 10-λογος για την αυτονόμηση του μαθητή

Do you want to be an Independent Learner? Then you should...

- ...know why you're learning English
- ...develop a learning plan (this plan changes according to your current needs)
- ...take part in group-work
- ...do self-evaluation tests to see what your weak points are
- ...ask the teacher for information when you need it
- ...look up words you don't know in a dictionary
- ...read or listen to a text to get the general idea first
- ...use the **learning strategies** in every unit to understand English and communicate better
- ...always have in mind who you're writing a letter or an e-mail to and why
- ...use books, magazines, the Internet, etc. to find the information you need

Moreover, in the TBs one can also find instructions to teachers about how to approach the information about language learning strategies they find in the SBs. For example, in the introductory section of the 4th grade TB (p. 8) we find the following about the Strategy corner in the Student's book:

“When working on the strategy corner, explain the statements in the table and ask the learners to tick the answer(s) they feel best fit(s) each of them, but remind them to keep in mind the statements while working on the unit. Come back at the end of the unit, review the statements and ask the learners if they have changed their minds about any of their answers and if they have come to realize which strategies work best for improved understanding and enhanced performance. When you come back to the statements, it would be useful to keep a record of the most popular answers and, if necessary, exploit the corresponding strategies in the teaching process”.

The text is a good example of explicit strategy instruction following the stages of identification of strategies, self-monitoring of their use, self-evaluation of their outcome, reviewing, and revising. It remains to see how well the recommendations are adopted by the teachers. The reason I am skeptical about this is that I did not find further reference to strategies in the TB in the sections dealing with the individual units of the SB, although detailed instructions are repeatedly provided about the teaching procedure of the various activities of the units. It would have been very helpful if this guidance were repeated in the sections in which one can find the ‘strategy corner’ in the SB and instructions were provided about the particular strategies found in that ‘corner’ each time.

In the TB of the 5th grade, one of the two Methodological Tips suggested by the authors as guidelines to teachers (the other one being *Multiple Intelligences*) is *Language Learning Strategy Definitions* (pp. 6-7), where a general definition of LLSs is given and O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) taxonomy of strategies and their definitions of individual strategies is provided. Following this, there are only four more references to strategies in the TB, one of which refers to ‘teaching strategies’. One of the other instances refers to the Speaking and Writing Skills and has to do only with instructions to ‘pair work’.

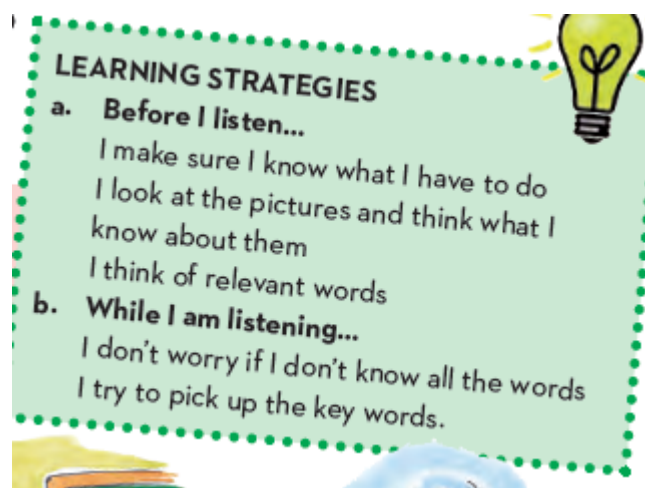
The TB of the 6th grade is better organised. To begin with, teachers are reminded of the strategy categories and their definitions according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990). Furthermore, general instructions at the beginning of each unit include recommendations about how to sensitise learners in the use of strategies for the development of a particular skill. The following example provides guidance for listening comprehension strategies (p. 60):

“Learning Strategies: Before I listen

Help your pupils to use strategies in order to reach the meaning of a listening text. They can use their *background knowledge* of the topic, the situation, they can *draw conclusions from context*, they can try to *understand the main idea*, to *listen for specific information*. Remember always to *give them a purpose for listening*. Ask them what else might help them in order to be effective listeners. They may give you their opinion about *typescripts, tapes, videos* or *listening to you or to other people*. Perhaps they will come up with the idea that it is easier to understand *if they are able to see the person talking (body language, gestures* etc. help a lot). From time to time prepare a

monologue yourself, *ask them to listen to you and give them a purpose* (emphasis mine)”.

The highlighted phrases all refer to well known strategies useful for the development of listening comprehension in a FL. The above excerpt corresponds to the ‘strategy corner’ of p. 66 in the 6th grade SB which refers to the strategies:



The list of listening strategies in the SB is poorer than the one found in the teacher’s book and there is hardly a matching between the strategies mentioned in the two books. This mismatch may create a problem during the lesson.

I do not know how well these instructions are followed by the EFL teachers. From the appearance of the coursebook series we can admit that an attempt has been made in order to include LSI in the methodology of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. My comment is that more frequent reference to the ‘strategy corners’ should be made in the TBs, otherwise the strategy tips may go unnoticed both by teachers and learners, especially when there is pressure of time. More explicit tuition should be incorporated in the TBs to make sure that teachers’ awareness is raised to such a degree that they would try and implement strategy instruction in their classes more directly. Certainly, the students’ age and L2 level do not call for a fully explicit LSI but a certain degree of discussion or evaluation of the adopted procedures could help if it is made frequently and systematically.

4.2.3 The ‘Think Teen!’ English coursebook series for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, secondary education

The coursebook series has been written for EFL students of lower secondary education, young teenagers of 13-15 years old. They are expected to be from A2 to B1 levels according to the Council of Europe’s CEFR (2001).

In the introduction of the TB for beginners (p. 7) and intermediate learners (p. vii) in the 1st grade, learning strategies are among the main aims of the series as we read:

“In particular, the main aims of the series, among others, are:

- the acquisition of basic knowledge, skills and communication strategies so that students will be able to function satisfactorily in different linguistic and cultural environments.
- the development of learning and communication strategies with particular emphasis on the development of students’ linguistic awareness and the promotion of ‘learning how to learn’ techniques

through real life experiences so that students can become autonomous learners”.

Also there is a section ‘Focus on Learning Strategies’ in the TB for advanced 1st graders (p. xvii) – as well as in the TB for beginner 1st graders (p. 19) (a copy-and-paste text) – in which teachers are given advice as to how to work with students.

“Teachers are advised to go through the list of strategies at the specific point in each unit so that students become aware of the strategies they can use to do the tasks. For example, in Unit 2, Lesson 1, students can go through the reading strategies before they do the reading task (see SB p. 26)... Finally, students can be reminded of the specific strategies for all similar tasks and they can go back to these tables from time to time”.

This is what we find on p. 26 in the SB for advanced 1st graders:

| FOCUS ON READING SKILLS | | |
|--|-------------|--------------|
| <i>Tick ✓ the reading strategies that have helped you in this unit. Which strategies do you want to try in the future?</i> | | |
| Reading Strategies | Great help! | I'll try ... |
| 1. Read the task carefully to understand what you have to do. | | |
| 2. Look at the title / pictures of the text and guess what it is about. | | |
| 3. Think of words / ideas you might find in the text before you read it. | | |
| 4. Read the text quickly to check your guesses and get its main idea. | | |
| 5. Read the text more carefully to find the information you need. | | |
| 6. Remember that you don't need to know all the words in a text. | | |
| 7. Try to guess what a key word means. The text can help you. | | |

During self-evaluation, learners are given the opportunity to evaluate the strategies they have used as they are also asked to mark the ones they would like to use in the future. I hope this section is well exploited by the teacher, as the evaluation stage is very important for raising students' awareness of what they do during learning and how effective a particular procedure has been.

Teachers are further directed in the TBs where the appropriate references on skill-area strategies are in the SBs in the form of:

p. 7 Project Strategies SB p. 90

p. 13 Grammar Strategies, SB p. 126

but without any further elaboration.

Similar patterns are repeated in the SBs and TBs of the three grades. However, in the 3rd grade SB the strategy corner refers to general proficiency strategies and not to a specific skill area each time, as if the authors are trying to revise the strategies that have been presented and practised in the lower levels in a random order. Besides, no more instructions are provided in the TB. What we find in the SB is something like the following (p. 13):

Strategies: I can use the title of a text to infer text content

I can learn and practise whole language chunks and idiomatic expressions

I can listen carefully to understand how speakers feel

Overall, the authors seem to have made an attempt to instruct teachers how to help students select and use language learning strategies. The TBs, however, are not reader friendly and the instructions are not detailed and consistent; moreover, they lack information about how to integrate strategy instruction in the language class. Besides, most of the information is restricted to the introductory sections of the TBs without further guidance. Furthermore, the ‘strategy corner’ in the SB is not always tied to the activity or the activities for which it is was meant, so the students or the teacher are expected to look at other pages of the book to find the relevant section, something I find rather laborious and not very motivating. For instance, on p. 32 of the 1st graders’ SB (Advanced) we read:



And 10 pages later (p. 42) we find the strategies for working on a project:

| Project Work Strategies | | Great help! | I'll try ... |
|--|--|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Decide what each of you wants to do. | | | |
| 2. Make a list of your steps. | | | |
| 3. Try to help each other in your team. | | | |
| 4. Look for information in books, newspapers, magazines or the Internet. | | | |
| 5. Use the language you have learnt in your presentation. | | | |
| 6. Talk about different ways to present your work and choose the best ones. | | | |
| 7. Use photos, drawings, short texts and/or recorded material. | | | |
| 8. Use technology (e.g. power point, an overhead projector, a camera, a video camera etc.) | | | |

This fact allows me to suspect that teachers may not pay much attention, and instead focus on more familiar teaching procedures without elaborating on strategy instruction. What is missing is instruction of how to make use of the information on strategies that the books have incorporated. Regretfully, I had the impression that the sections on LLSs were added to the series, in order to satisfy the requirements of the curriculum rather than make a serious attempt to incorporate them in the teaching and learning procedure.

5. Conclusion and suggestions

From the analysis and evaluation of the English Coursebook series for primary and lower secondary education I have concluded that there is a paradox when one looks, on the one hand, at the *Magic books* series and, on the other, at the coursebooks for the upper grades of the primary level as well as the *Think Teen!* series for the three grades of the lower secondary level: The *Magic books* are full of implicit information about LSI practices and guidance to teachers although they have not been written with such an approach in mind; the primary and secondary series are full of explicit information about LLSs and instruction in the introductory sections but offer poor guidance to teachers as to how to implement such an instruction in the actual everyday lessons. Simply including strategy taxonomies and definitions in the

introductory sections is not enough to make teachers interested in adopting an LSI approach in their teaching. Teachers, like students, primarily need constant guidance as to how to apply such an approach, but first they have to develop an interest in it, which will make them willing to try it with their students.

From the study of the coursebook series, a general finding is that in all of them LSI, if any, is rather fragmentary and implicit. I would therefore, suggest to the authors the incorporation of more focused learning strategy instructions for teachers in the TBs in all series in order to raise teachers' awareness and guide them towards applying LSI. Without the teachers' willingness to apply such an approach, the process will fail. But teachers should be carefully instructed. Ideally, I would like to have a TB like the one in the *Magic books* series being enriched with explicit instructions to teachers how to use learning strategies because the books are rich in detailed guidance. A little more explicit reference would make the difference. Also the TBs for primary and secondary education should include details found in the *Magic Books* as a useful guide for teachers of those levels, with the relevant modifications to suit the age and proficiency levels of the students they are intended for.

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